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ABSTRACT

A behavioral intervention program for child abusers was evaluated using multiple cutcome criteria. Families were assigned to treatment (N=8) and control (N=8) on a first-come basis. All families were supervised by protective services and none had requested help voluntarily. A treatment program involving group parent training in the clinic and competency-based training and rehearsal in the home was provided by trained clinical psychology graduate students. The results strongly suggest that training abusive parents in child management and self-ccntrol techniques leads to imprcvements in parent effectiveness as measured by observations of parenting skills and parent/child interactions, parental report of child behavicr prcblems, and caseworker report of family problems. Ten-week follcw-up revealed that these improvements were maintained, and at one-year followup no child abuse had been reported to or suspected by caseworkers for those families completing treatment. Findings support the social learning mcdel of child abuse and point to efficient methods by which to train abusive and "at-risk" parents in appropriate child managemer t techniques. (Author)

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GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL PARENT TRAINING WITH CHILD ABUSERS

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GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL PARENT TRAINING WITH CHILD ABUSERS

Group behavioral parent training methods have received wide recognition for their efficacy in modifying maladaptive parent/child interactions with voluntary, non-abusive parents, yet a controlled outcome study of a behavioral approach with child abusers has not been performed. The present study was conducted to investigate the effects of a group and individual treatment approach with child abusers through the use of a control group methodology, utilizing multiple outcome measures of change.

Subjects for this study were 16 family units comprised of at least one adult and one child per unit. Ss were referred to the Child Management Program by the local child welfare agency following an investigation of a complaint against either parent of physical child abuse (i.e., not sexual abuse or neglect). Ss were accepted who showed indications of abuse as documented by the agency and/or courts, and for whom parent training appeared to be the most appropriate treatment need. Eight control families were supervised at home by a state child welfare agency worker for ten-weeks prior to starting treatment. Ss in the treatment sample (N=8) met for two hours each week for 8 weeks, and received instruction and modeling in (a) Human development, and (b) Child management, as well as informal group discussion and structured rehearsal. Additionally, trained family therapists (clinical graduate students) rehearsed these skills with the family members at home (one hour/week) and assisted in the implementation of the techniques. Home visits were designed to assist the parents at their own pace in solving their child-related problems, and were competency based (progression to new skills proceeded once mastery of simpler skills was demonstrated).

Results: Blind observations of parent/child interactions in the home revealed that parents in the treatment group had acquired appropriate child management skills (i.e., positive reinforcement, commands, appropriate punishment methods) and performed these skills when teaching their child, when requesting compliance, and in free interaction (see Table 1). Parental responses to a child behavior inventory indicated parents in the treatment group reported significantly fewer number of child problems than the control group, although no differences in intensity of problems were found (Table 2). Comparisons between the two groups in terms of caseworker ratings of family functioning in ten areas revealed that the caseworkers supported the observed changes in parent effectiveness, especially in the three areas of child management, child development, and anger control (Table 3). Follow-up data supported the maintenance of these reported changes at ten-weeks following treatment termination.

These findings demonstrate that abusive parents can learn and apply appropriate child management techniques to resolve child-related problems, and family functioning is restored (or established) following such training. Viable alternative forms of punishment were learned and applied by parents who had previously resorted entirely upon physical coercion to control their child. These data support the social learning model of parent aggression and suggest that the application of low-cost, brief parent training is an effective strategy of intervention with recognized abusive families.

TABLF 2

Pretest and Posttest Scores for Treatment and Control Groups

Measure	Treatment Families	Supervised Control Families	F
Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory			
PROBLEM SCORE			
Pretest M (SD)	11.6 (3.3)	24.1 (3.9)	
Posttest M (SD)	1.8 (1.9)	22.4 (6.7)	7.4*
INTENSITY SCORE			
Pretest M (SD)	130 (24.3)	184 (19.5)	
Posttest M (SD)	83 (20.8)	155 (48.8)	n.s.
Parent Performance Checklist[a]			
POSITIVE REINFORCMENT			
Pretest M (SD)	6.5 (6.0)	10.0 (9.3)	
Posttest M (SD)	89.8 (10.4)	2.4 (3.5)	184.0**
COMMANDS/PROMPTS			
Pretest M (SD)	30.4 (10.0)	43.8 (15.6)	
Posttest M (SD)	94.4 (12.5)	35.8 (12.5)	73.7**
APPROPRIATE PUNISHMENT			
Pretest M (SD)	17.6 (7.7)	5.9 (7.1)	
Posttest M (SD)	89.9 (5.7)	6.5 (5.7)	160.2**

TABLE 2 (Cont'd.)

Measure	Treatment Families	Supervised Control Families	F
	Sequential parent/child interactions[b]		
CHILD COMPLIANCE			
Pretest M (SD)	45.1 (26.3)	71.0 (21.9)	
Posttest M (SD)	93.6 (6.4)	54.4 (17.7)	22.6**
PARENT APPROVAL			
Pretest M (SD)	5.1 (9.0)	15.4 (19.6)	
Posttest M (SD)	59.6 (21.2)	2.4 (5.3)	38.8**
	Agency Referral Questionnaire[c]		
CHILD MANAGEMENT			
Pretest M (SD)	6.6 (.5)	6.6 (.5)	
Posttest M (SD)	2.6 (.9)	6.0 (.9)	64.6**
CHILD DEVELOPMENT			
Pretest M (SD)	5.4 (1.4)	4.9 (1.2)	
Posttest M (SD)	1.8 (.9)	5.5 (1.4)	25.4**
ANGER/IMPULSE CONTROL			
Pretest M (SD)	5.9 (1.4)	5.3 (1.6)	
Posttest M (SD)	2.5 (.9)	5.4 (1.7)	23.9**

[a]figures represent percent correct

[b]figures are in percentages

[c]rating scores range from 1 (Low) to 7 (High)

* $p < .01$

** $p < .001$

TABLE 3

Mean Pretest and Follow-Up Scores for Five Treatment Families

Measure	Pretest M (SD)	Follow-Up M (SD)	t value
Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory			
PROBLEM SCORE	12.6 (3.2)	2.6 (2.7)	5.68**
INTENSITY SCORE	126.4 (19.4)	80.2 (12.5)	4.82**
Parent Performance Checklist			
POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT	7.4 (7.2)	75.0 (26.0)	7.42**
COMMANDS/PROMPTS	32.0 (12.8)	92.8 (5.5)	10.21**
APPROPRIATE PUNISHMENT	9.6 (5.2)	93.0 (14.0)	8.45**
Sequential Interactions			
CHILD COMPLIANCE	48.6 (28.7)	91.0 (9.95)	3.03*
PARENT APPROVAL	7.2 (11)	53.6 (27.2)	3.49*

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$